

CUTTING/REMOVING TREES IN A WETLANDS

The Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act and the Spencer Wetland Protection Bylaw were created, as stated in the Bylaw: "The purpose of this chapter is to preserve and protect the floodplains and wetlands and adjoining lands in the Town of Spencer by regulating and controlling activities deemed to have significant or cumulative effect upon the functions and characteristics of wetlands areas. These laws protect all wetlands, riverfronts and buffer zones, which is the area within 100' of any wetlands. (Note the Riverfront zone extend 200' from the banks of any perennial stream and is a resource area.)

So why do cutting trees and removing natural, biodegradable materials like trees harm the wetlands? Here are some of the reasons the Spencer Conservation Commission regulates tree cutting:

- When trees fall they break down and become habitat for a variety of species that live in or off of dead trees and they eventually breakdown to provide soil nutrients.
- When trees are cut down, wetlands soils can become wetter over time since the root systems of these trees are no longer drawing water from the ground.
- Trees, via photosynthesis in their leaves, are constantly removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and returning oxygen.
- Trees provide wildlife habitat, stabilize soil, improve water quality by nutrient uptake and help regulate ground temperatures to provide a better environment for ground vegetation and cool water.
- Trees also act as carbon sinks, mitigating the rapidity of climate change

There are times when property owners do need to remove trees that are in a jurisdictional area, i.e. an area where the Conservation Commission has jurisdiction under the Wetlands Protection Act and the Spencer Wetlands bylaw. In these cases, the removal or cutting of trees must be permitted by the Commission. The Commission recognizes these needs and will work with owners to provide guidance on how to cut and remove trees in a manner that will benefit the property owner and not harm the wetlands. Finally, residents should understand that studies have shown that activities immediately adjacent to wetlands very often harm the wetlands and therefore the closest 25' to a wetland resource area is given special consideration by the Commission.

If you have any additional questions or require assistance understanding the limits or activities permitted/prohibited within the area of conservation jurisdiction, please feel free to contact the Conservation office during business hours.

Your cooperation is appreciated, thank you.